1:Ammar E,1-5 (1951) 1954
MR13 Fellahin MR13
Silwa

[812] [294] [320] learned women who had finished a Kuttab course and proceeded to a higher educational course in either al-Azhar or the College Mosques (Madrasah); but their numbers were very small in comparison.[1] I was told by one of the Kuttab Sheikhs that some of the pious ancestors recommended that women should only know a few chapters of the Koran to enable them to say their prayers, and also to learn particularly Surat al-Nur.[2] He went on further to say that Imam Malik thought it inadvisable to teach reading and writing to girls as well as to the sons of 'tyrants and oppressors'.[3]

The following is an account of how a boy spends his day in the Kuttab. The day begins always before sunrise and the first boy who arrives in the morning opens the Kuttab door with the key which is usually hidden underneath the door or outside the threshold. The Sheikh (always called by the boys 'Our Master')[4] arrives later, usually after sunrise; until his arrival, the boys would be busy reciting their assigned portion of the Koran which they had written on their wooden tablets the day before. On the Sheikh's arrival, older or more advanced boys would one by one hand over their tablet to the Sheikh and go on reciting what is written on it, and on satisfying the Sheikh as to their proper and accurate memorizing, they would be asked to clean their tablets and proceed to the next assignment. The same procedure is followed with the younger boys. Those who have failed to satisfy the Sheikh by forgetting sentences or hesitating in the correct pronunciation would be asked to go on repeating their assignment to be heard again by the Sheikh later on. In his work in the Kuttab, the Sheikh, especially if he is blind, relies a great deal on one or two monitors ('areef).

[993] After proving that they have learnt their assignment, the boys are asked to wash their tablets with water, the drops of which must fall into a pot, and not be allowed to fall on to the ground as they contain the dissolved words of God on which no one should tread, as this is considered to be sacrilege (haram). This also applies to the tablet itself when the assignment is written on it, and a boy who drops it on the ground has to kiss it in respect. After washing the tablet with water, however, thus removing the previous writing, a layer of whitish clay is put on it to render the surface fit for writing again. The ink is made by the boys themselves, by mixing fine oven soot with ground roasted nuts of a gum tree together with some gum. This mixture is left for some time to brew before it is actually

[1] D. B. MacDonald, *Aspects of Islam*, pp. 933–4.

[2] On looking up this Koranic chapter, the writer found that it mainly dealt with preventive measures against fornication and slander, and related the story of 'Ayisha, the Prophet's wife, when she was slandered by enemies, and how God revealed the truth about her chastity.

[3] The writer had no opportunity of checking the truth of this statement attributed to Imam Malik.

[4] The Kuttab Sheikh is usually called by this title, 'Our Master', even by adults, especially the illiterate people—see Taha Hussein, *al-Ayyam* (An Egyptian Childhood).

2: Blackman E-5 (1920-1926) 1927
MR13 Fellahin MR13
Upper Egypt

323 the vessels; otherwise the pots would crack while being baked in the kiln.

When the pots have thus been dried in the sun they are handed over to a woman, who takes each one in turn and smooths the base of the vessel with a knife, cutting off the superfluous clay. The pots are then returned to the disks and left to sun-bake again for two or three days. They are then passed on to another woman, who paints them all over with a slip (Fig. 73). This is made of [386] powdered *ṭafl* (a yellow clay) mixed with water. The pots are

[291]

FIG. 72. THE POTTER MAKING HIS WHEEL REVOLVE

now left to dry for ten minutes or so, when they are passed on to another set of women and girls, who polish them both inside and out with a smooth pebble of basalt (Fig. 74 and p. 152, Fig. 80). When this process is completed they are handed on to a woman [531] artist, who paints them all over with simple designs (Fig. 75). The [386] paint, which is made of a material called *mughreh* (red ochre), pounded up and mixed with water, is applied with a feather. The designs are freehand, and are put on very rapidly, without any pattern to work from.

The pots are now ready for the kiln, where they are fired as soon as the oven is ready for them, but they can be put on one side for a short time without any detriment if the preparation of the kiln is not complete.

[Text continues on p. 148]

consist of a red, pink or varicoloured petticoat and wide coloured drawers. The *fellaha* does her own rather clumsy sewing, but the cloth is bought.

The cotton stuffs, calicos and other fabrics used for the fellah's clothing come mostly from Japan, Italy and India. Imports from other countries are becoming more and more insignificant as the Egyptian weaving industry develops. The indigo or black dyes are produced in the country, and all the clothes are made up in Egypt. *Gallabiyas* and dresses are made to measure; shirts, drawers, waistcoats and caps are ready-made. Jewish commission agents often undertake to supply the big villages with the necessary quantities of material or ready-made clothes. The goods are sold just before the big feasts. The old wool-spinners and local weavers provide only a small part of the total supply (11).

The dullness of the women's attire is relieved by striking ornaments. Round the neck they wear strings of big yellow or blue beads; on their wrists a number of bracelets made, according to wealth or fancy, of glass, silver or even gold; on their ankles the *kholkhal*, a massive anklet of bronze, silver or gold, which takes the place of our wedding ring and must always be worn by a married woman. Everything else may be sold, but not this. If there is a bereavement in the family a woman lays aside her ear-rings, necklaces, and bracelets; the *kholkhal* she takes off only on the death of her lord and master. The women never wear socks or stockings, but sometimes use sandals or slippers like the men.

This strikingly simple clothing betokens an old civilisation and a supple adaptability to climate and practical needs. The fellah's loose, simple clothes permit him to breathe easily and to move freely. They keep the outlines of the human form in harmony with the countryside. On the other hand, they are dark-coloured and hot — the head-dress and the women's clothes at least — so that they absorb the sun's heat instead of reflecting it. Their excessive length hinders walking and stirs up the dust. However, the advantages outnumber the disadvantages, and the habits which have retained such a costume so long unchanged show a deep-rooted wisdom.